



# Emotional and Social Development

## ■ Developing a Sense of Self

## ■ Developing a Sense of Self with Others

*“Peer relations contribute substantially to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults. Indeed, the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not school grades and not classroom behavior but, rather, the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children.”*

**Willard W. Hartup**

**T**he Emotional and Social Development domain involves children’s feelings about themselves and their relationships with others. Development in this domain is influenced by a child’s temperament, cultural expectations, and early experiences. Emotional support and secure relationships foster the child’s self-confidence and self-esteem. Particularly important in this domain are the skills children demonstrate while making friends, appreciating differences, solving conflicts, and functioning effectively in groups. These characteristics form the foundation for learning and the relationships that give meaning to life. Positive relationships are essential to a child’s emotional development and later academic success.

Preschool children are beginning to demonstrate the emotional well-being and social skills needed to interact well and to form and keep relationships with adults and peers. They are beginning to express their own feelings appropriately and seek help when needed.

Children of this age group are beginning to demonstrate some degree of independence and follow basic rules and routines. They work and play alone at times, as well as participate in group activities and work or play cooperatively with other children.

## **Identity: Exploring the Possibilities**

*Josh and Javita were working on a block construction, but every time they tried to place large blocks on top of smaller ones, the stack teetered and fell down. Josh finally pushed all the blocks off the table in frustration. Their teacher had been observing and went over to talk with them. “I’ve noticed that the blocks keep falling down, and I can tell this makes you angry,” she said thoughtfully. “I wonder why this keeps happening? Maybe there is a different block that can go on the bottom.” Javita chose the largest block and began stacking again; Josh joined in, and soon they had succeeded in building a tall tower. The teacher proceeded to help them make a “SAVE” sign to protect their work and then snapped a photo of them with their construction. Copies of the picture went into the children’s portfolios, documenting their growing ability to work together cooperatively and manage frustrations.*

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## Developing a Sense of Self

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*Emotional and social development refers to children’s feelings about themselves and their relationships with others. These areas of development are influenced by maturation, temperament, cultural expectations, and experiences.*

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### Widely Held Expectations

#### Children begin to:

- Show self-confidence as they develop abilities and potential.
- Demonstrate persistence with challenging activities, showing a can-do attitude.

- Demonstrate increasing self-direction and independence, especially with regard to self-help skills and separating from primary caregivers.
- Demonstrate increasing competence in regulating, recognizing, and expressing emotions verbally and nonverbally.
- Enjoy playing alone or near other children.
- Develop skills for coping with adversity and change.
- Express and manage anger appropriately.
- Develop an awareness of personal uniqueness, regarding themselves as having certain abilities, characteristics, preferences, and cultural identities.
- Recognize that they are members of different groups (e.g., family, preschool class, ethnic group).
- Use pretend play to express thoughts and feelings.

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### Strategies for Early Educators

- Help establish a sense of trust and security by developing warm and responsive relationships with every child. Greet each of them by name daily. Through smiles or friendly gestures, show you are pleased to see them.
- Respect individual temperaments and personal uniqueness and be aware of any personal circumstances in a child's life.
- Encourage children to express their feelings through appropriate words and actions.
- Communicate often with children, both individually and in small groups. Listen to what they are saying and show you value their opinions by acknowledging them and building on their ideas.
- Involve children in planning related to the classroom (e.g., ask for and use their ideas about visual displays, book selections, and activities).
- If possible, use children's home language in daily conversations with them.
- Help children identify themselves as unique individuals and as members of different groups (e.g., create and display family photo books; ask the children to describe something that is special about another child; put a full-length mirror in the classroom; use given names and pronounce them correctly).
- Design the classroom in a way that stimulates and challenges children and gives them choices that are appropriate for a range of ages, developmental stages, and abilities (e.g., freshen materials in activity centers to reflect emerging themes generated by children and children's interests).
- Support the growth of children's feelings of competence and self-confidence (e.g., use books and games they create; provide access to materials that encourage them to stretch their abilities; provide positive comments about their accomplishments).

- Allow children to experiment without fear of criticism or danger. Treat mishaps such as spilling, dropping, or knocking over objects as opportunities for positive learning.
- Make the classroom environment safe, pleasant, and joyful. Promote the use of humor and singing.
- Make room in the classroom for cozy, safe areas where children can be alone if they wish.
- Get to know children's families and value them as partners. Invite their participation and input through comment cards, home visits, and casual conversation – especially when things are going well.

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### Strategies for Families

- Provide your child with a dependable, warm, and loving relationship.
- Listen to your children and observe them. Know what they are interested in and build on that with activities you can share.
- Involve your child in planning activities such as meals, celebrations, and outings.
- Nurture a child's natural curiosity and encourage the trying of new things by sharing the world and celebrating it together.
- Help your child identify and understand the emotions she feels.
- Set a good example through the way you address intense feelings such as fear, anger, jealousy, sadness, and excitement and in the way you handle conflict.
- Help children see the natural consequences of their actions in a positive way – such as helping them put away their toys while explaining that this will make it easier to find them the next time.
- View all experiences, both positive and negative, as opportunities for further exploration and learning.
- Raise children's awareness of their cultural heritage and their pride in it.
- Understand what can realistically be expected of children in general and your child in particular.

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## Developing a Sense of Self with Others

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*Critical conditions of emotional and social development include emotional support and secure relationships that foster a child's self-confidence and self-esteem. A child who is securely attached to family and culture develops a healthy sense of identity.*

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## Widely Held Expectations

### Children begin to:

- Approach others easily with expectations of positive interactions.
- Seek out others when needing emotional support, physical assistance, social interaction, problem-solving, and approval.
- Develop awareness of personal behavior and its effect on others.
- Balance their own needs with those of others in the group.
- Work to resolve conflicts positively.
- Play and interact cooperatively with other children (e.g., taking turns, exchanging ideas).
- Show interest in and respond to other points of view.
- Respond to others' feelings, including showing empathy.
- Develop the ability to distinguish between unintentional and intentional actions.
- Show ease and comfort in their interactions with familiar children and adults.
- Form and maintain positive relationships, including friendships with children and adults.
- Recognize, respect, and accept similarities and differences among people, including people with disabilities and those from varying cultures.
- Follow social rules, transitions, and routines that have been explained to them.
- Recognize the classroom as a caring community in which members take care of property, respect the rights of others, and keep one another safe.

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### Strategies for Early Educators

- Create opportunities for children to interact with others who have varying characteristics and abilities, identifying and pointing out areas in which they share a common interest.
- Observe children in the classroom and facilitate their entry into social groups with their peers.
- Promote respect and appreciation for each child's culture and the cultures of others (e.g., develop a family photo wall and talk about each family, including people of various cultures, ages, and abilities).
- Invite families to visit the classroom and share their cultural experiences.
- Alert children to the feelings and emotional needs of others (e.g., display and talk about pictures depicting various emotions; point out how children feel in various real-life situations).
- Help children see the effect of their behavior on others by encouraging them to see things through other perspectives and share their ideas about solving

problems and social conflicts (e.g., facilitate the process of conflict resolution).

- Protect children's right to express emotions. Allow them to be sad or angry and validate those feelings by naming them and talking about them. Encourage them to ask for help when needed.
- Ask for children's ideas in establishing classroom rules and limits. Establish, model, and explain simple rules in terms they can understand.
- Be aware of social interactions among children and create opportunities to support friendships.
- Make the classroom the children's space, with displays of their creations, experiences, interests, and cultures.
- Create many inviting areas of the room where small groups of children can play.
- Model asking for and understanding the viewpoints and opinions of others.
- Promote an atmosphere of cooperation instead of competition (e.g., introduce activities that require two or three children to work together).
- Provide opportunities for children to be responsible members of the classroom community, respecting shared rights and property and helping others (e.g., assign individual cubbies for belongings; rotate responsibility for tending classroom plants).
- Maintain an ongoing flow of information between school and family, through home-school journals or cassette tapes, suggestion boxes, weekly newsletters, phone calls, or classroom visits.

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### Strategies for Families

- Encourage and reinforce caring behavior in your child by outwardly showing affection to members of your family.
- Share your feelings and emotions.
- Create opportunities for positive interactions and friendships in a variety of settings (such as participating in neighborhood potlucks or impromptu ball games).
- Encourage children to ask for assistance when needed, being aware of their emerging skills.
- Establish, explain, and model simple rules (a bedtime routine, for example) in terms your child can understand.
- Promote respect and appreciation for your own culture and for the cultures and abilities of others. Establish traditions such as sharing family stories and celebrating special events or occasions.